

VZCZCXRO3172
RR RUEHDBU
DE RUEHNT #1889/01 3031451
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 301451Z OCT 07
FM AMEMBASSY TASHKENT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 8682
INFO RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 2750
RUEHAH/AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT 3401
RUEHTA/AMEMBASSY ASTANA 9607
RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 1203
RUEHEK/AMEMBASSY BISHKEK 4017
RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE 3880
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 3728
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 0387
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 2097
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TASHKENT 001889

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR SCA/CEN AND DRL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/30/2017

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KG](#) [UZ](#)

SUBJECT: ERK LEADER DESCRIBES RELATIONSHIP WITH SLAIN
JOURNALIST ALISHER SAIPOV

REF: A. A) TASHKENT 1888
 1B. B) TASHKENT 1887
 1C. C) BISHKEK 1320
 1D. D) TASHKENT 1855

Classified By: POLOFF R. FITZMAURICE FOR REASONS 1.4 (B, D).

1. (C) Summary: On October 26, Erk political opposition party leader Atanazar Arif described to poloff Erk's relationship with journalist Alisher Saipov, who was murdered on October 24 in Osh, Kyrgyzstan (ref C). According to Arif, Saipov was not an official member of Erk, but had long standing ties with the organization. Separately, an opinion piece criticizing accusations that Uzbek authorities were involved in the killing appeared on an independent website whose operator is believed to have contacts with Uzbek security services, and the MFA demarched Ambassador October 30, condemning Saipov's murder (ref B). End summary.

LONG-STANDING TIES WITH ERK

2. (C) Saipov, an ethnic Uzbek and Kyrgyz citizen from Osh, Kyrgyzstan, reportedly first contacted Arif and Erk leader Muhammad Solikh (who has been in exile from Uzbekistan since 1992) via email while still studying journalism in Osh. Both Arif and Solikh were impressed by Saipov's letters and his apparent commitment to democratization in Uzbekistan. Arif later invited Saipov to his home in Tashkent in 2002, and donated to him his old computer, with which Saipov reportedly launched his journalistic career.

INTERNATIONAL TRAVELS; WORK WITH ANDIJON REFUGEES

3. (C) Saipov was later invited to meet Solikh and Arif in Istanbul and in Europe. According to Arif, Saipov also reportedly traveled to Pakistan and Iran to meet religious opposition figures, including Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) leader Tahir Yuldashev (Comment: While targeted disinformation is a possibility, human rights activists and opposition members have in the past had contact with families of IMU recruits, so the claim is not inconceivable. End comment.) Arif said that by the time of his death, Saipov's

office in Osh had become "one of the major centers" of opposition to President Karimov. Arif said that Saipov also interviewed many of the Andijon refugees who fled to Kyrgyzstan in 2005. According to Arif, Saipov interviewed more than 500 refugees and closely followed their cases.

SMUGGLING ERK LITERATURE AND OWN NEWSPAPER INTO UZBEKISTAN

¶4. (C) Arif reported that Saipov was involved in smuggling Erk literature to Uzbekistan via Osh, most recently this month, and that he also distributed his own newspaper, "Siyosat" (Politics), throughout Uzbek territory in the Ferghana Valley. Saipov also reportedly met frequently with Erk activists based in Kyrgyzstan.

GOU REACTION TO KILLING

¶5. (C) The independent Uzmtronom website posted a letter on October 27 that looks suspiciously like a government viewpoint. The letter is from Gennadiy Svintsov, a correspondent from the government-sanctioned newspaper Namanganskaya Pravda. Svintsov criticizes accusations that Uzbek NSS may have been behind the murder, instead suggesting that the Uzbek opposition might have killed Saipov to frame the government. Uzmtronom adds that the letter reflects the view of many citizens of Uzbekistan. Uzmtronom's operator, Sergei Yezhkov, formerly worked in official media and maintains communication with Uzbek security services (ref D).

¶6. (C) Prior to Saipov's killing, the government-controlled

TASHKENT 00001889 002 OF 002

press in Uzbekistan ran several stories critical of the journalist this year. For example, in a September 6 article from the pro-government Sngnews.ru website (which was later reprinted on the government-controlled Press.uz.info website on October 7), Obidkhon Mamatov from Namangan State University accused Kyrgyz officials of not taking steps to stop Saipov and his subversive activities against Uzbekistan.

He further accused Saipov of producing and distributing "subversive literature" and collaborating with well-known "terrorists," including Solik and Yuldashev. In a June 16 article on the government-controlled Press-uz.info website, journalist Janibek Jeenbekov accused Saipov of receiving financial assistance from the West to "Americanize" residents of the Ferghana Valley.

¶7. (C) MFA demarched Ambassador October 30, condemning Saipov's murder and expressing willingness to work with the Kyrgyz authorities, if asked, to investigate the crime (ref B).

COMMENT

¶8. (C) Arif has been a reliable contact of the Embassy for many years and we do not suspect him of collaboration with Uzbekistan's security services. It is possible, though, that his report that Saipov traveled to Iran and Pakistan and met with IMU leader Yuldashev, as well as his report during the same conversation with poloff that Erk was holding recent talks with Hizb ut-Tahrir leaders in Istanbul and Moscow (see ref A), is GOU disinformation intended to tarnish Uzbekistan's democratic opposition by drawing links between them and religious extremists. In light of the provocative nature of this news, we will carefully evaluate any future communication with and information from Arif.

NORLAND